

Call for papers for a special issue of *Population Studies* – a journal of demography

‘How do we estimate excess mortality? Current problems and methodological solutions’

Guest editors:

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Motivation:

In the last 20 years, excess mortality estimation has become a widespread technique for quantifying the demographic and social impacts of contemporary and historical mortality crises. However, there is surprisingly little systematic methodological work on the topic, and the work that has been published has shown that excess mortality estimates can be highly sensitive to the theoretical and practical foundation of the underlying models, as well as issues of data availability (e.g. Andreasen & Simonsen, 2011; Chandra & Christensen, 2019; Nepomuceno et al., 2022; Duerst & Schöley, 2024; Wakefield & Knutson, 2025). The effect of these issues is that, for example, in the context of its official assessment of the Covid-19 pandemic in Norway, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health declared that there is simply ‘no gold standard for calculating excess mortality’ (Knudsen et al., 2023).

In May 2026, the London School of Economics hosted a two-day workshop, aimed at demonstrating the need for consensus about the use of excess mortality methods and at scoping out the key areas of methodological disagreement (full programme [here](#)). One presentation outlined the preliminary results from the ‘One Epidemic, Many Estimates (1EME)’ challenge, in which 22 teams of researchers estimated the mortality of the 1918 influenza pandemic in two US populations using the same data but the excess mortality methods of their choice. Like previous ‘many analysts’ challenges, the 1EME challenge revealed the need for researchers to delineate precise research questions and to theorise what analytical choices allow them to best answer those questions (e.g. Auspurg & Brüderl, 2021; Engzell, 2023; Rohrer et al., 2025). Other presentations at the workshop worked towards answering some of the methodological questions raised by the 1EME results.

Call details:

This special issue of *Population Studies* seeks to foster the methodological work and consensus-building that began at the London workshop. The guest editors embrace the fact that the question in the title of the issue can be read in two ways: in a descriptive sense (‘how are scholars currently estimating excess mortality?’) and in a prescriptive sense (‘how should scholars be estimating excess mortality, conditional on their research questions?’). Read together, the title invites detailed assessments of the current state of excess mortality

estimation, as well as thoughtful methodological papers that suggest solutions to the outstanding problems and disagreements relating to how to estimate excess mortality.

The descriptive reading of the title will be fulfilled by a series of commissioned articles that speak to the current practice and long history of excess mortality estimation. The guest editors plan for this to include the IEME paper; an essay by historians of medicine; an essay on the ethics of how (excess) mortality estimation is commonly practised; and a commentary on how excess mortality estimation has been transformed in recent years.

To fulfil the perspective reading of the title, **the guest editors are making an open call for contributions relating to the methodology of excess mortality estimation.** The objective of the special issue is not to establish a single preferred method for estimating excess mortality—in particular, because different excess mortality analyses have different explicit or implicit different estimands in mind—but rather to clarify the methodological choices that drive variation in estimates, identify areas of agreement and disagreement, and provide researchers with a clearer framework for selecting and evaluating methods, conditional on their estimand of interest (see Lundberg et al., 2021). To that end, submissions to the open call should identify a specific methodological question or problem to be addressed; offer an answer or solution to that methodological issue; and outline the conditions under which that approach is valid.

Pre-submission enquiries for submitting to the issue are mandatory and due by **1 December 2026**. Enquiries should take the form of a proposed title and abstract, and should be submitted to hampton.gaddy@magd.ox.ac.uk. It is encouraged that pre-submission enquiries explicitly state the research question that the authors are proposing to address. Full submissions to special issue will be due by **30 June 2027**, submitted via Population Studies' submission portal.

Potential topics of interest:

- Quantifying uncertainty in excess mortality estimates
- Interpreting negative excess mortality
- Small-area / small-population excess mortality estimation
- Using excess mortality to assess pandemic response
- The demographic standardisation of excess mortality estimates
- The data availability requirements of unbiased / accurate excess mortality estimation
- The empirical limits of excess mortality estimation

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